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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

OF

DAVID HUMPHREYS STORER.

BY

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DAVID HUMPHREYS STORER.

DAVID HUMPHREYS STORER was born in Portland, Me., March 26, 1804, and died in Boston, September 10, 1891. His father was Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas at Portland, and an elder brother became Chief Justice of the Supreme Bench of Ohio. Through his father he was descended from Governor Langdon of New Hampshire, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and through his mother from Governor Dudley of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Dr. Storer graduated at Bowdoin College in 1822, studied medicine in Boston under Dr. John C. Warren, and took his degree at the Harvard Medical School in 1825. He at once entered upon the practice of his profession in Boston, and after the hard struggle to which even talent is exposed in a strange city he gained position as one of the leading practitioners of Boston. In 1837, with Dr. Jacob Bigelow and others, he established the Tremont Street Medical School, a private school "which, as the germ of the present curriculum of Harvard, has borne much valuable fruit," but afterwards, in 1854, took the Chair of Obstetrics and Medical Jurisprudence in the Harvard Medical School, where he became Dean, in which capacity he served for many years.

His great success in the medical field has been properly recorded by his colleagues, and need not be further noticed here, since it was for his work in another department that he was chosen to the Zoölogical Section of the Academy, November 8, 1837.

Like most naturalists who have distinguished themselves in later life, his interest in natural history began at an early period. Entering college when not yet fourteen years of age, he came under the influence of Prof. A. S. Packard, for whom he retained through life a warm affection and admiration. At first mineralogy particularly interested him, and he greatly enjoyed the field excursions to mineral localities made with Professor Packard; the collections then made were afterwards given to one of his sons, and put to good service in teaching the first classes in the Institute of Technology.

Yet his taste for natural history at that early period was by no means confined to minerals; entomology engaged much of his attention, and he gave popular lectures on insects in the days when lyceum lectures were first instituted; he was also devoted to ornithology, and made at one time a large collection of birds' eggs; indeed, it was through his example and interest that his brother in law, our late associate, Dr. T. M. Brewer, became a student in this field. His taste



for collecting extended even to coins. At one time he was in league with all the toll gatherers on the Boston bridges, and they kept for him any odd pieces of money which fell into their hands. This passion for numismatics, it may be added, appears to have been handed down to his descendants, one son being still deeply interested in the subject, and a grandson the Curator of the Coins belonging to Harvard University. The coin-collecting mingled curiously with his Natural History interests, and we are told that he persuaded the keepers of several sailor's boarding-houses to secure for him any coins, shells, or fishes which their guests might have obtained in foreign parts.

It was natural that he should join the Boston Society of Natural History, which he did immediately after its foundation in 1830, so that he has always been enrolled as one of the "original members," though he was not strictly such; his activity is attested to by his being chosen a few months later Recording Secretary, a post he held for nearly six years. At this time he appears to have been giving special attention to Mollusca, and as a number of other gentlemen at the same period in our city were also forming collections, it was doubtless from the enthusiasm born of this common interest that he ventured to issue the prospectus of a contemplated translation of Kiener's "Iconographie," then in course of publication in Paris; but for lack of support only one part of the translation ever appeared, an octavo of about a hundred and fifty pages, issued in 1837. His own collection, kept until his death, has recently been given to Bowdoin College.

It is apparent, then, that in his early manhood he had made a somewhat thorough acquaintance with more than one department of natural history, and this makes it natural that his name was mentioned (and, if he had permitted, would have been urged) by his friends for the post of Naturalist to the government exploring expedition under Captain Wilkes. It explains, too, his success in a field he had then hardly cultivated; for the turning point in his career as a naturalist came when, in 1837, as the result of a memorial of the Natural History Society to the General Court, the legislature authorized a Natural History Survey of the Commonwealth, and the Governor appointed Dr. Storer one of the Commissioners to prosecute it. The several commissioners divided the work between them, and as Dr. A. A. Gould, an older and more experienced malacologist, was naturally assigned the Mollusca, Dr. Storer undertook the description of the fishes and reptiles of the State. He had previously paid some attention to one of these groups, the fishes, as is shown by the justly severe criticism of Smith's list of our species which he published the year before in the

"Boston Journal of Natural History"; but it is probable that his special acquaintance with this part of our fauna only began at about that time, when he was appointed one of the Curators of the Society's museum. Yet three years thereafter he published his report upon both the groups, an octavo volume of two hundred and fifty-three pages. Considering that these were just the years in which he was one of the chief supports of the infant Tremont Street Medical School, which gave systematic instruction throughout the year (the Harvard Medical School only for the four winter months), that he had the care and toil of an engrossing profession, and that scarcely the nucleus of a collection existed when he began his work, the result is certainly surprising. Through all the spring, summer, and autumn months, from five o'clock in the morning until the breakfast hour, he might be found engaged at the Society's museum over his specimens, snatching the early hours out of a busy day; every day, too, found him in the markets and by the wharves, interesting the fishermen in his eager search for strange forms of fish; this contagious enthusiasm was one of the chief sources of his success.

It was a token of his interest in and appreciation of this work that Agassiz, when he first landed on our shores, went directly to Dr. Storer from the house of Mr. Lowell, through whose invitation he had come to America. Dr. Storer's house was for years the daily resort of Agassiz and his Swiss associates, and with them his children grew up on the most familiar terms.

This work upon our Massachusetts fishes and reptiles was thoroughly done, equal to the best work of the time, and, like several other volumes of the remarkable series published under the auspices of the State, will ever remain a work of special value. That it was not complete no one knew better than the author, and this doubtless it was which led him to continue his investigations with the purpose of revising, enlarging, and perfecting it. To this he devoted all the forced leisure of more than twenty-five years, publishing the work by instalments in the Memoirs of the American Academy, with excellent illustrations, between 1855 and 1867; afterwards issuing it separately, under the title of "A History of the Fishes of Massachusetts," as a quarto volume of two hundred and eighty-seven pages and thirty-seven plates.

In this work he redescribed, and with greater fulness, all the species from our waters, and elucidated their natural history with the greatest care, paying particular attention also to the economic side. His style is lucid and simple, his descriptions perfectly clear and well ordered,

the synonymy carefully worked out. There is as yet no complete work of the kind for any part of the United States which surpasses it, and it will ever remain a land-mark in the ichthyological literature of the country; for it is a storehouse of facts, and it was the successful collecting and simple presentation of facts which made the volumes of several of the earlier commissioners — Harris, Gould, Storer, and Emerson — models of what natural history work of permanent value should be.

Dr. Storer's other considerable publication, the "Synopsis of the Fishes of North America," a quarto volume of nearly three hundred pages, published in 1846, is of less value, because distinctly a work of compilation, and he was not so skilled in the niceties of classification as in the descriptions of the different specific forms and the study of their histories; but it was the first considerable attempt to collate existing material, and as such it had its importance and convenience.

A man full of enthusiasm and sympathy, fearless, impulsive and generous, high-minded, high-spirited, and with a noble scorn of anything mean, deceitful, or unjust, Dr. Storer endeared himself alike to pupils and associates. No one who has known him will forget the open, brilliant expression of his mobile countenance, his piercing, friendly eye, the quick, impulsive speech, full of force and geniality; he was a friend worth making a sacrifice for, and not to be forgotten. In 1829, he married Abigail Jane Brewer, sister of the ornithologist, the late Dr. T. M. Brewer, by whom he had three sons and two daughters. His wife died in 1885. His children survive him; two of his sons have distinguished themselves in science, and have been elected to membership in this Academy. Dr. Storer was the recipient of many honors in his medical profession, a member of many learned societies, and received from his Alma Mater the degree of Doctor of Laws in 1876. At the time of his death he was the oldest physician in Boston.

